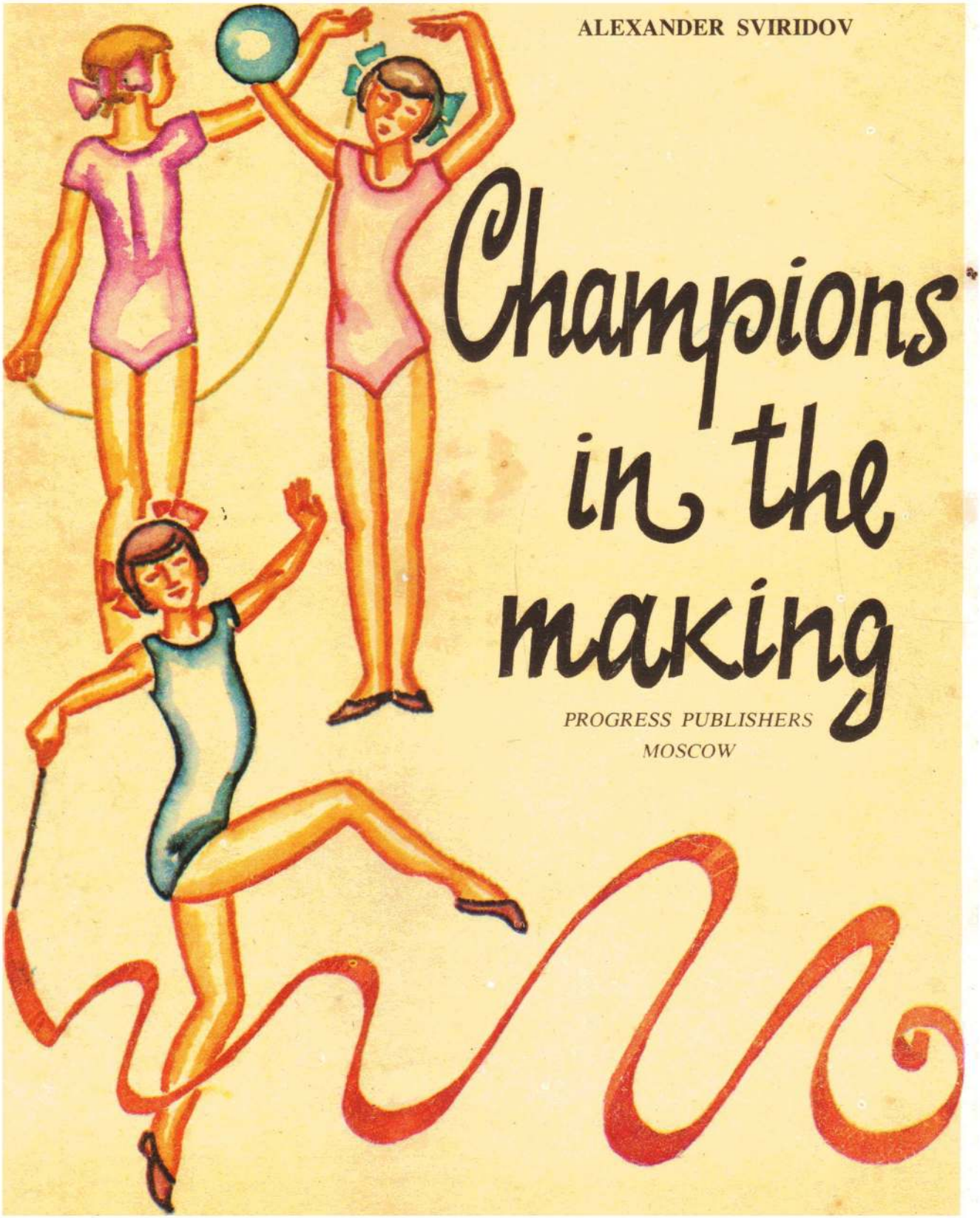
ALEXANDER SVIRIDOV

Champions in the making

MAY THERE
ALWAYS
BE SUNSHINE!



ALEXANDER SVIRIDOV

Champions in the making

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ПУТЬ В ЧЕМПИОНЫ

На английском языке

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The P.T. Lesson

Roman went off reluctantly to the P.T. lesson. The boys and girls were putting on their sports clothes in the changing room. Roman pulled on his white shirt and dark-blue shorts, laced his sports shoes and plodded into the gym, almost last.

Roman was scared of the gym. It was a vast, high-ceilinged hall with wide shining windows and had all sorts of fascinating things. On the walls between the windows there were several wooden ladders which the P.T. teacher called wall bars. Large goal posts with nets hung on opposite sides of the gym. Roman knew they were used in basketball games. Thick ropes hung down

from the ceiling to the floor in the far corner. It was very hard to climb to the top of them and not every boy could manage it. There were white, yellow and red lines on the wooden floor. Nina Borisovna, their P.T. teacher, explained that each line was used for basketball, volleyball or handball. She also said that when they were a little older she would teach them all these games.

Roman's thoughts were interrupted by noise and shouting. Nimble Misha Sizov, who was on duty that day, had brought a ball and a crowd of boys had gathered round him to practise football.

"Goal!" shouted Sasha Kolosov as he struck the opposition's goal mouth. Then he ran to Roman who was sitting alone on a bench.

"Hey, why are you sitting all alone? Come and join us!"

"Don't feel like it," Roman answered despondently. He was a quiet boy, and was afraid of noisy, lively games for which you had to be physically strong, know how to push, not be afraid and boldly join the

scuffle. Roman was afraid of bumps and bruises.

"Well, please yourself!" Kolosov shrugged his shoulders and dashed after the ball.

Meanwhile Kolya Rusov had untied the ropes and was climbing up, slithering funnily like a monkey. He had already reached the half-way mark. He went on climbing and when he had almost reached the top, he began to slow up! He was obviously tired but didn't give in and stubbornly pulled himself upwards, even reddening from the strain. But he still wasn't strong enough and slid down. When he had got back his breath, Kolya noticed Roman: "Come over here!"

"No," Roman declined again and mumbled, "somehow don't feel like it now..."

Roman was not telling the truth. He very much wanted to climb a rope, too, and reach the top first or score a goal when everyone was watching but he was terrified that he couldn't and everyone would see

how feeble and weak he was and would laugh at him.

"That's too bad!" said Kolya and climbed onto the rope again.

A cheerful crowd of girls flitted into the gym, quickly formed a team and began playing ball.

The bell rang three times for the start of the lesson.

"Line up!" Misha Sizov ordered.

The children quickly arranged themselves according to height, boys first and then the girls.

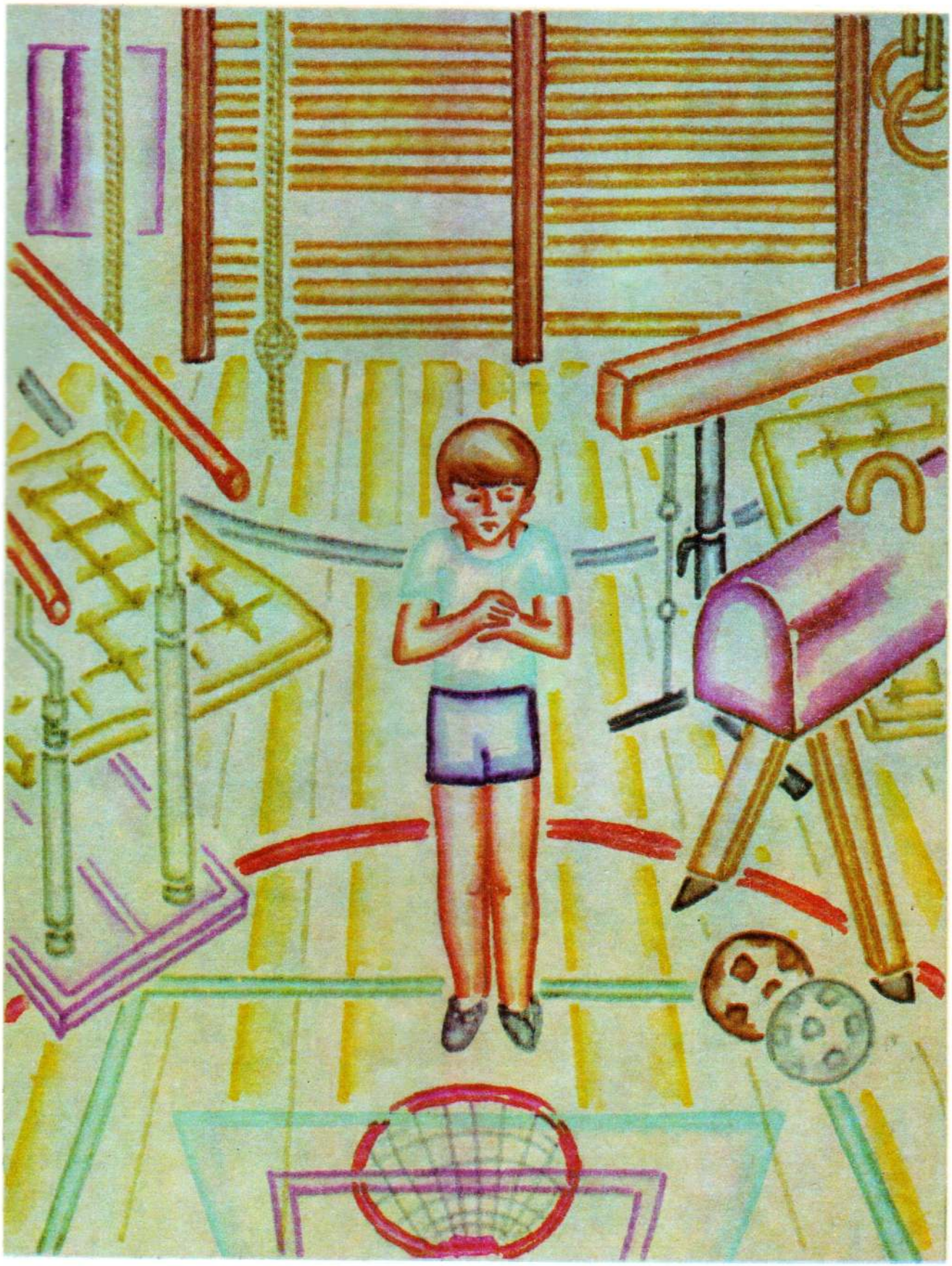
Their teacher walked into the gym.

"Face right!" Misha commanded. "Roll call!"

When the roll call was over, Sizov jogged towards the teacher and reported to her.

"Fifth form 'A' is ready for the class! No one's absent!"

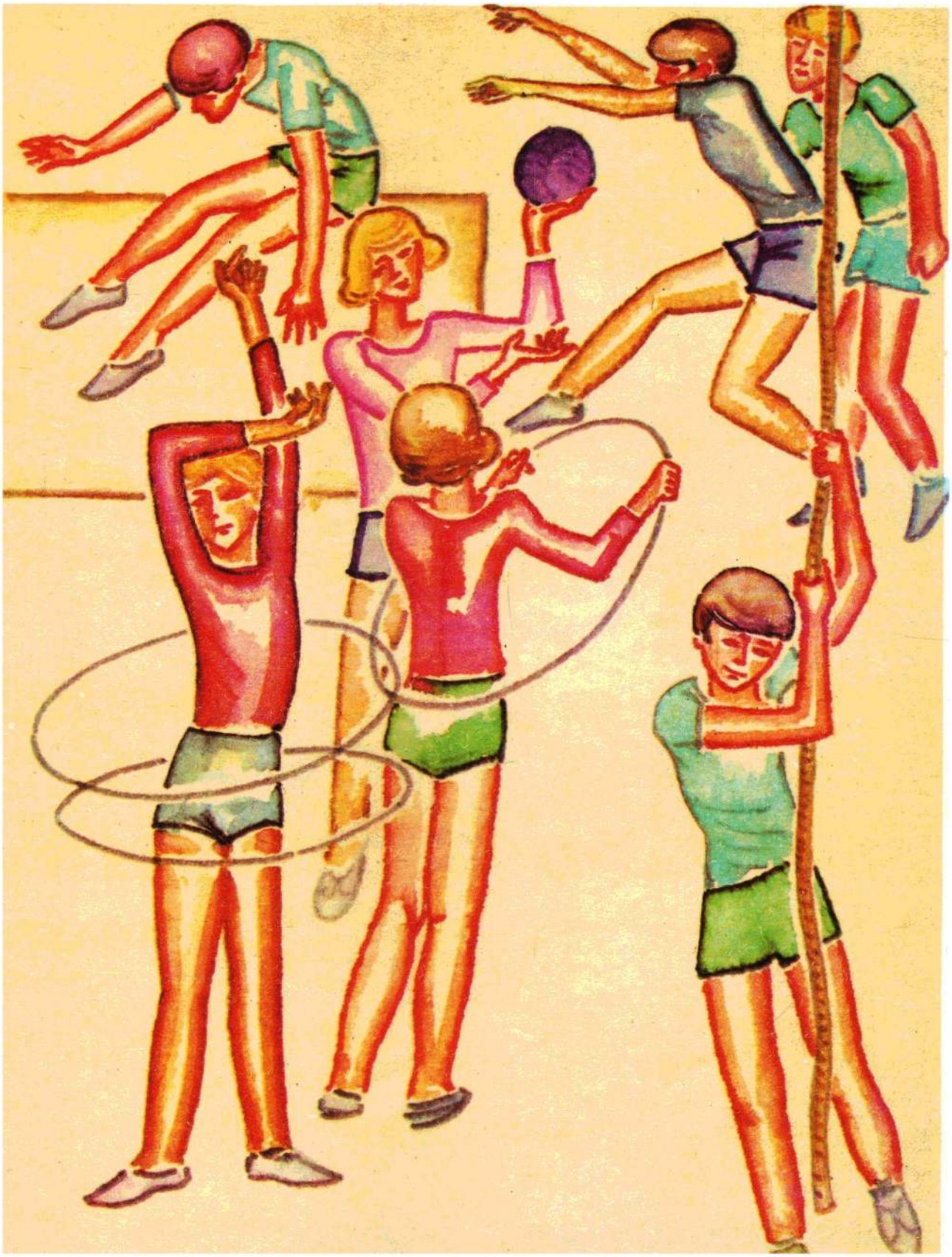
"At ease!" said the teacher. "Today we're going to practise gymnastics. Girls on the bars and beam, boys on the horizontal bar. But we'll limber up first. Everyone turn right and march round the gym!"



The lesson had begun. Together with the others Roman ran, jumped, did various exercises and goose-stepped but he did it all very half-heartedly and tried to rest as often as he could. The loathsome word gymnastics was pounding in his head and he felt very nervous. He remembered what the teacher had said about the horizontal bar and shivers ran up his spine. "Now everyone's going to see that I'm no good at anything!"

No matter how lazily Roman moved and how much he shirked, he still tired quickly and began puffing. He looked enviously at Sasha Kolosov and Kolya Rusov who were doing the exercises with the greatest of ease. "They're tough," he said enviously, "not like me who's already covered in sweat!" Roman didn't like feeling he was worse than the others and so, when the limbering-up was over, he sighed with relief.

After the limbering-up they switched over to erecting the gym equipment. Their teacher opened the store-room adjoining the



gym. It contained all kinds of sports equipment. The children rushed after their teacher and carried out the horizontal bar, assembled it, whooping with joy, fixed it to the floor and tightened the wires across it. Some helped the girls to drag over the bars and beam and others dragged the soft foam mats out of the store-room and laid them near the apparatus. Their teacher carefully watched what her pupils were doing and made suggestions.

Roman dragged the mats along with the look of a doomed victim. They were about to practise what he dreaded most—gymnastics.

The first exercise was to swing on the horizontal bar. Kolya Rusov was best at this exercise. He walked confidently up to the bar, pushed lightly off the mat with his feet and was hanging on the bar in a trice. Then he carefully lifted his legs and began swinging to and fro faster and faster. As he swang forward he released his hands, deftly formed an arc in the air and landed gracefully and neatly on the mat.

It was now Roman's turn. He was scared stiff as he walked up to the bar, jumped, clung onto it with all his might and shut his eyes tightly. Then he jerked his body once and then a second time as if he had cramps. His fingers were clasping onto the metal bar so tightly that he could not swing.

"Why are you clutching onto the bar as if you were drowning!" Misha Sizov shouted out while everyone else laughed loudly and then he suggested: "Release your hands a little."

"Here we go," Roman thought miserably, "they're already laughing." He hung from the bar and did not know what to do.

"Why are you hanging there like a sausage. Go on, release your hands!" someone shouted. Roman didn't know who and couldn't think about it now. Following the advice, he tried to open his fingers slightly but lost control: his fingers, which had become sweaty from excitement, slid open treacherously and slipped from the bar. Roman crashed downwards onto the thick soft mats.

He stood by the bar looking dazed and pathetic. He felt ashamed that he was so feeble and clumsy. He waited for them to start laughing at him but nothing happened. No one laughed. He looked round in amazement and saw their teacher reproachfully shaking her head.

"Tell your father or mother to come to see me," she told Roman sternly. "This won't do at all! You need to start training straightaway!"

The Family Council

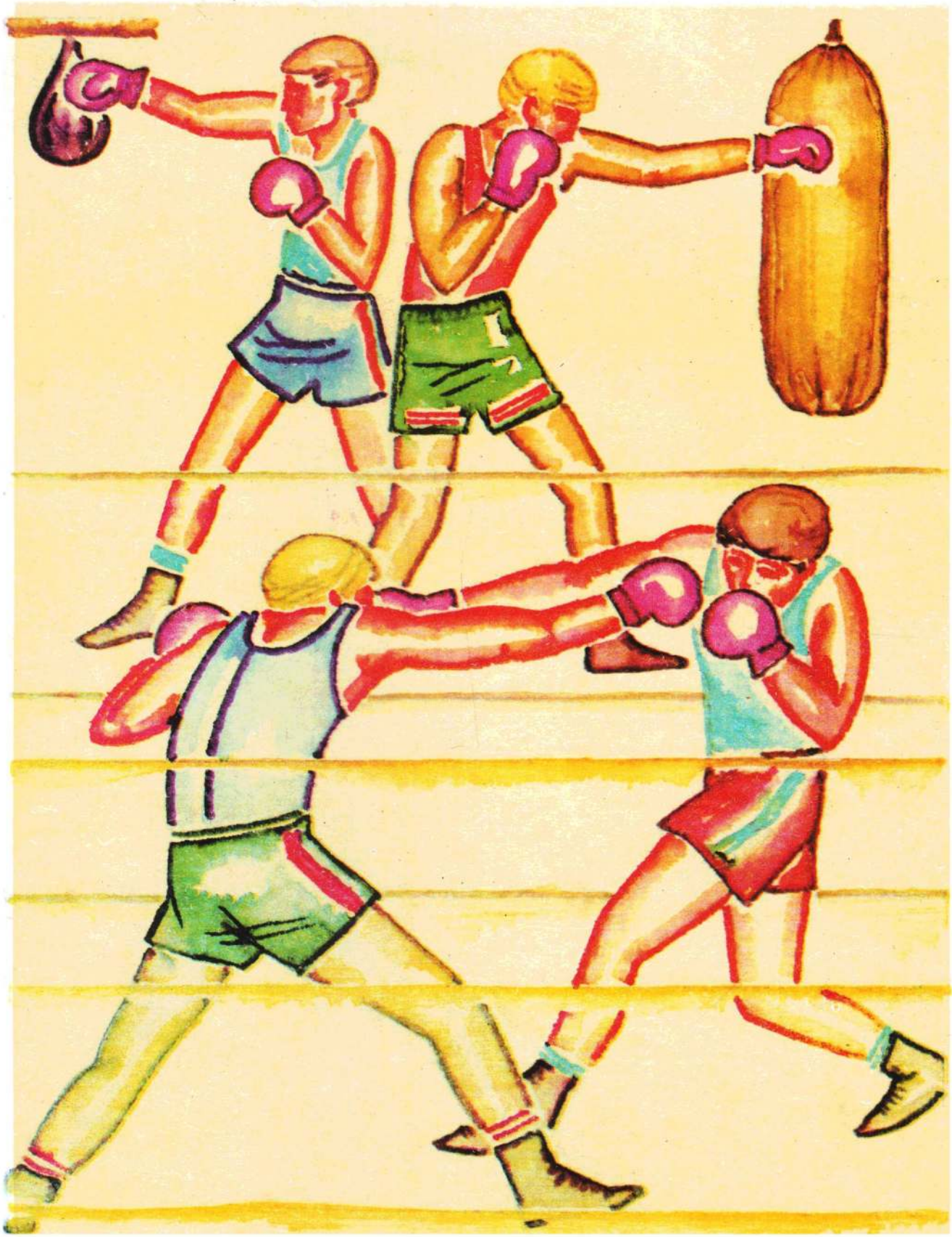
On the following day his father, mother and grandmother gathered for a family council. What they heard from the P.T. teacher had truly alarmed everyone at home. While Roman was practising on the piano in the other room, they began a heated debate. Each of them made different suggestions.

Taking advantage of her age, his grandmother began first: "Roman should take up boxing," she said convincingly, "only then will he turn out a real man. He'll be bold, strong and healthy and capable of hitting back anyone who insults him!" His grandmother paused and recovered her

breath. "The more so, that he'll only have to go next door to our local sports club."

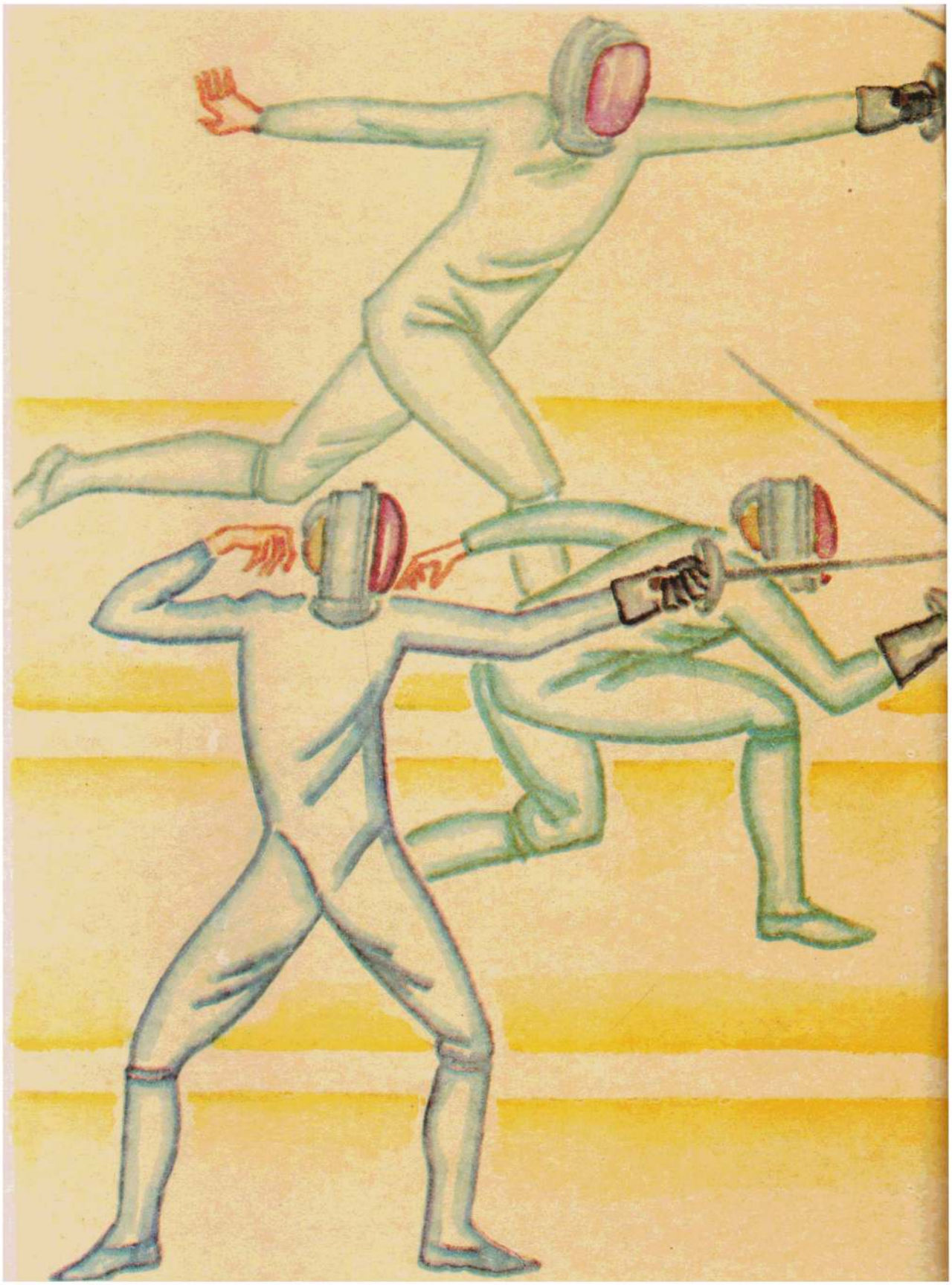
"Oh, no! Boxing's out of the question," his mother chimed in. It wasn't without reason she considered herself chiefly responsible for her son's upbringing. "Boxing isn't a sport. It's just brawling and I won't allow my boy to go about the whole time with scratches and bruises, or even worse, with a broken nose! He should take up a sport which will not only develop his muscles but his mind, too. The kind of sport to win which you don't need brute force but subtle judgement and quick wits. I consider that my son should take up fencing or at least chess. Only the other day as I was passing a youth sports centre I noticed a large advertisement for new entries to the sports sections."

"You have to go three stops on the trolleybus to get there!" his grandmother interrupted. "And what's more, you've got to cross a wide, heavily congested street! How can we let our boy go that far! And, anyway, he's only got a little spare time and



his piano practice and homework take up a lot of time. But our local sports club's very close in the house over there. And he doesn't have to cross any streets."

"What's all the fuss about!" his father exclaimed. He decided as the head of the family to let the others have their say first. Now that they had made their positions clear, he finally considered he should share his ideas on this account: "Does it really matter how far the sports centre is away from home?" he asked Granny. "Look outside, we're not living fifty years ago, you know, when people rode horses down the streets. Look how busy the traffic is: buses, cars, trolleybuses, trams, taxis, to say nothing of the underground! You can now get anywhere in the city in less than half an hour. In my opinion it's not the distance but the kind of sport which our Roman needs most that matters. He spends most of his time sitting about. Our trouble is nowadays, we don't get enough exercise. And I don't completely agree with you, either," he looked at his wife and explained.



"I mean chess. Well, fencing is an energetic sport! We need a sport which will make our boy move more and become physically fitter. I think our best bet is track and field athletics which involves all sorts of exercises for developing the human body in a harmonious way: running, jumping, shot-put, hammer and javelin throwing and competitive walking. I think the best place for him to train is in our factory's sports club where the trainers are excellent sportsmen and many of them were once famous champions."

"No, our Roman should take up boxing," Granny stuck to her guns.

"Fencing is the most aristocratic and sophisticated sport!" his mother insisted.

"Alright!" his father agreed. He realised that each had his favourite sport and no one was going to give in. "This is what we'll do: we won't force our decisions upon the boy but show him all the different sports in turn and let him choose for himself!"

In the Factory's Sports Club

When his father returned from work the next day, he said: "Roman, get in the car. We're going to the sports club at the factory."

Roman did not need to be told twice for he loved riding in the car. A few minutes later they were racing along the wide avenue.

Every little boy loves riding in the car! The engine drones evenly, the car rocks smoothly on the elastic springs, spinning over the kilometres of roadway with its rubber tyres. Neon advertisements and shining shop windows flash past on either side and the green, red and amber eyes of traffic

lights blink cheerfully at cross-roads. You sit in a comfortable seat and enjoy inhaling the special smell of the car.

But that day Roman did not particularly enjoy the drive with his father in the car. The unfamiliar words "sports club" vaguely alarmed and frightened Roman deep inside and he became uneasy and fidgety. Perhaps this was caused by the very slight change in his father's behaviour which Roman, no matter how hard he tried, could feel but not explain.

"Whatever will be, will be!" Roman decided.

The boy's unusual, tense silence did not slip his father's attention. "The lad's obviously worked up," he thought and suddenly caught himself thinking that he was anxious, too. After all, he was taking his son to his friends at his factory!

"Would you like me to tell you all about our factory, son?" he asked and without waiting for an answer, continued: "I was a young whippersnapper when I came to the factory. It was a long time ago during the

war. We didn't think about sport then. Everything changed after the war. Spacious, brightly-lit factory shops began to be built. The working-day was shortened. Workers began to have more free time. Then sport for the workers and their families was considered. You see, a person who goes in for sport is physically fitter and falls ill less often, which means that he works better. First, we decided to build a stadium. We built it ourselves after work and on our days-off. Then we built a gym, a swimming pool and a field track. Oh, we've arrived!" his father exclaimed. "Now you'll see it all for yourself!"

They got out of the car and went towards the large glass doors marked "Entrance".

The factory grounds were clean and planted with grass and trees. Roman's father led him along the asphalt road, explaining as he went: "The main factory shops are over there behind those trees. You see that tall glass and concrete building with wide windows? That's the shop I work in. And there's the sports centre..."

Roman immediately spotted the stadium: it was easy to recognise by the oval stands. Next to the stadium there was a large rectangular building with huge full-length glass windows through which you could see the light-blue mesh of metallic props supporting the unusual and at a first glance, strange-looking, skeletal roof.

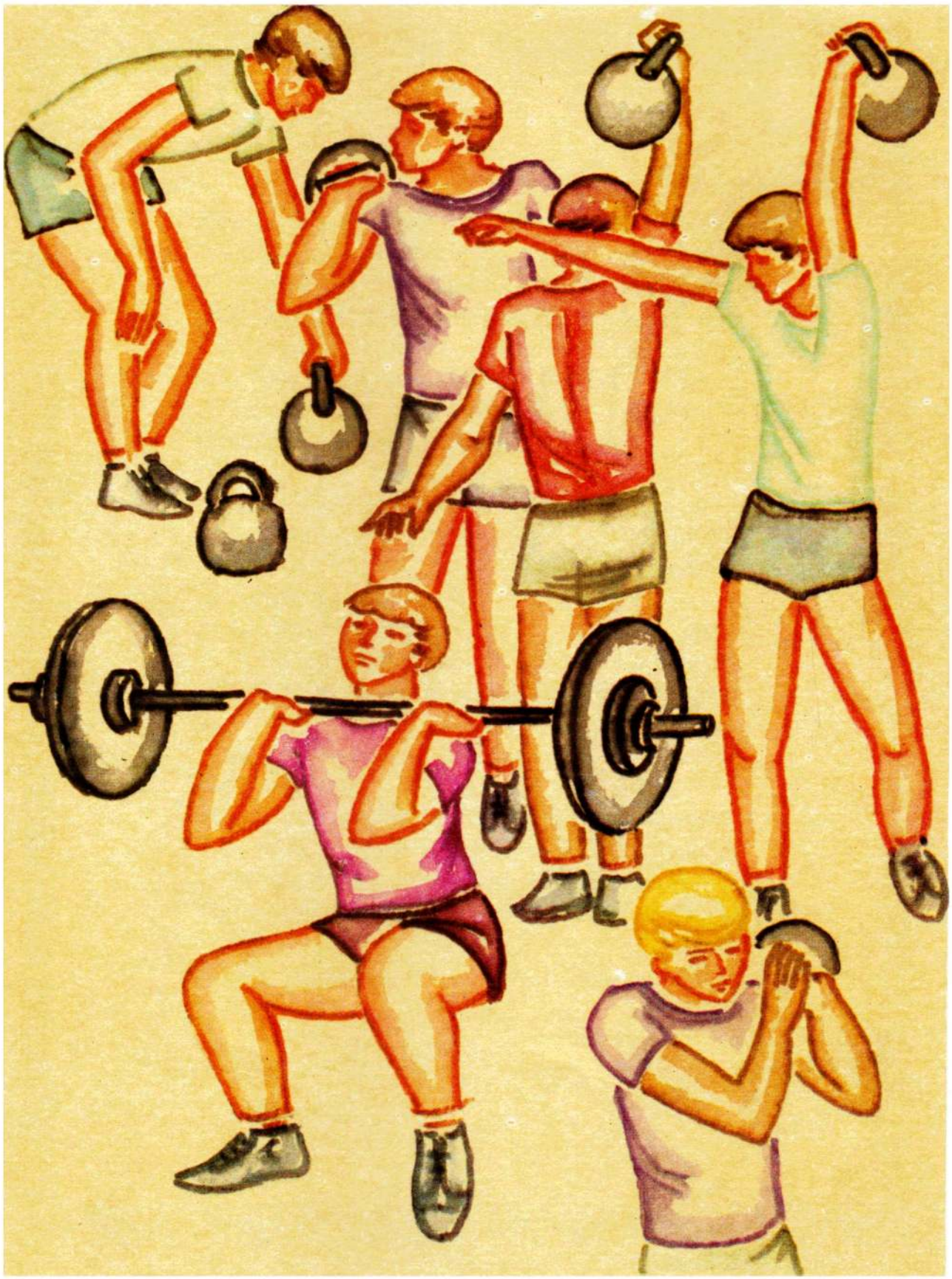
"What's that?"

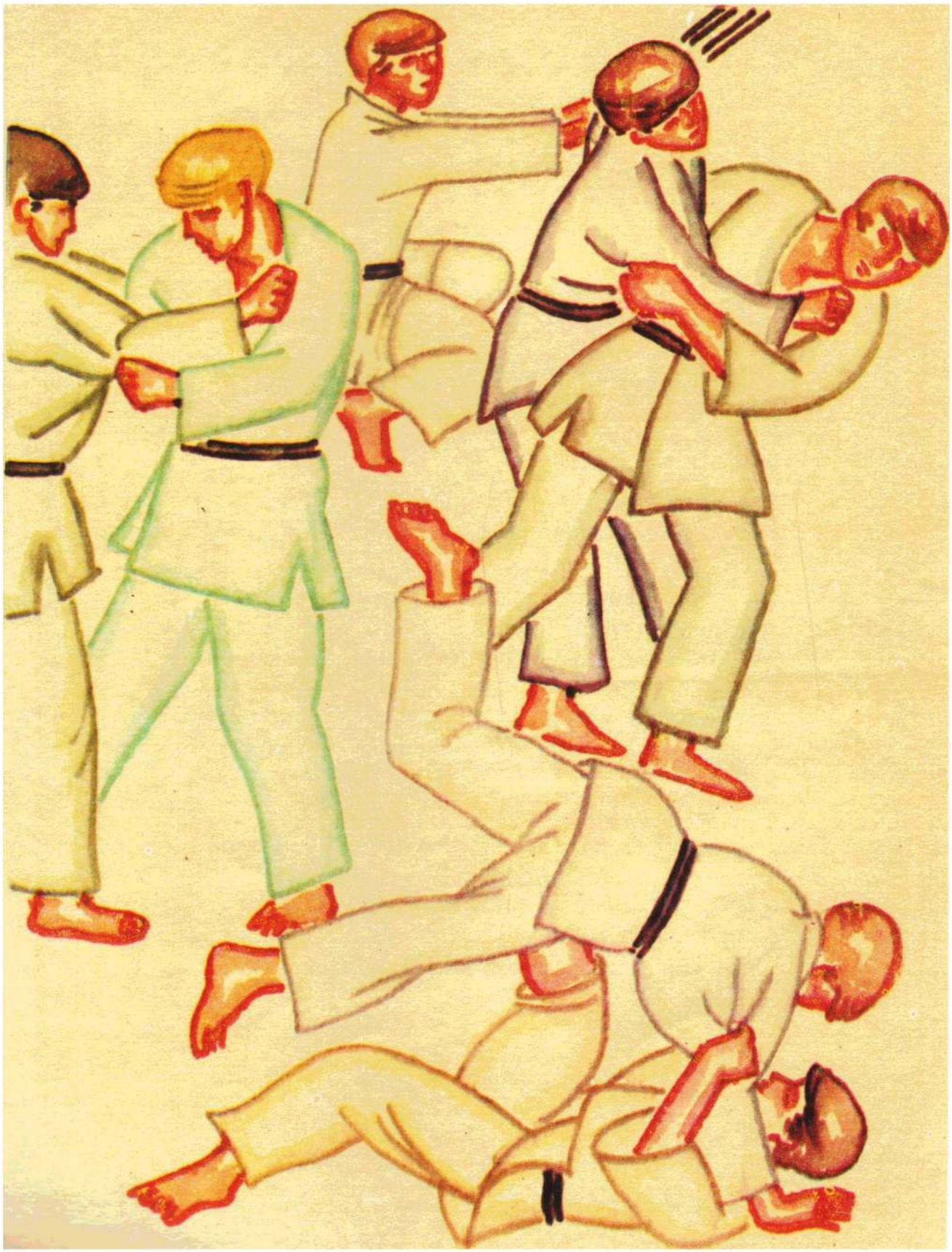
"That's the gym, son! That's where we're headed."

They went into a long narrow corridor along which there were doors on both sides. Each one had a sign on it. Roman's father stopped for a moment in front of the door marked "Coaches".

Roman's heart started pounding anxiously. "Now they're going to give me some kind of test and I won't be able to do it," he thought with a feeling of doom. "Then I'll, of course, never be accepted. What good am I to anyone! And Daddy will get angry at me..."

A tall man in a blue track-suit, which





closely fitted his athletic body, got up to meet them.

"Hello," Roman's father said. "I've brought my son to you. Say hello, Roman."

"That's grand," the coach replied. "We're getting together a group right now." And he looked attentively at Roman.

Roman felt a chilling sensation. "Now he's going to give me an exercise and see that I'm no good at anything!"

"Have you done much sport?" the coach asked.

"No," Roman stammered with fright and thought: "Now I'm in for it!"

But nothing terrible happened. The coach beamed and said: "Well, in that case you'd better go and have a look first. And then you can choose what you like. So let's go in there."

Roman felt a wave of relief.

He was dazzled by the bright light after the cool dark corridor. When his eyes had become slightly accustomed to it, Roman saw a hall which was probably large enough to hold a football pitch. However, no one

4
18
24

was playing football in it. The sportsmen were training at other events. Some were high-jumping, others were long-jumping and shot-putting in a fenced-off area. A dark circular running track marked with thin white stripes was laid out round the perimeter of the gym.

Flushed sportsmen were running on different sections of the track.

Suddenly Roman's attention was caught by something unusual: a yellow spotlight like a sunbeam was darting along beside the runners.

"Look, a sunbeam!" Roman exclaimed. "Over there on the track! Look, there it is!"

"That's not a sunbeam!" the coach touched Roman on the shoulder. "It's electric. Lamps have been set up on the edge of the track. From a special control panel this sunbeam can be directed to run faster or slower as the coach wishes. The runners try to keep up with it. This gadget's called a 'light leader'. Now do you understand?"

"Yes," Roman replied.

The group of runners came up beside

them and Roman recognised Sasha Kolosov among them.

"Do you train here?" Roman asked in amazement.

"Yes," he replied as he ran along. "Do you want to join up, too?"

"Don't know yet."

"What do you mean," Sasha objected and mimicked, "'don't know'? Do join up with us!"

He wanted to say something else, but he waved his hand and shouted, "We'll talk about it afterwards!" and raced off to catch up his group.

"So that's why Sasha Kolosov's so good at gym," Roman guessed. "He trains in his spare time!"

When Roman and his father left the gym it was already dark outside. They walked slowly along, each lost in his own thoughts.

Clashing Swords

"Get dressed, Roman. We're going to the youth sports centre," Roman's mother said. "Hurry up! I've got a lot of other things to do!"

"Here we go!" Roman thought in alarm. He gloomily began to get ready.

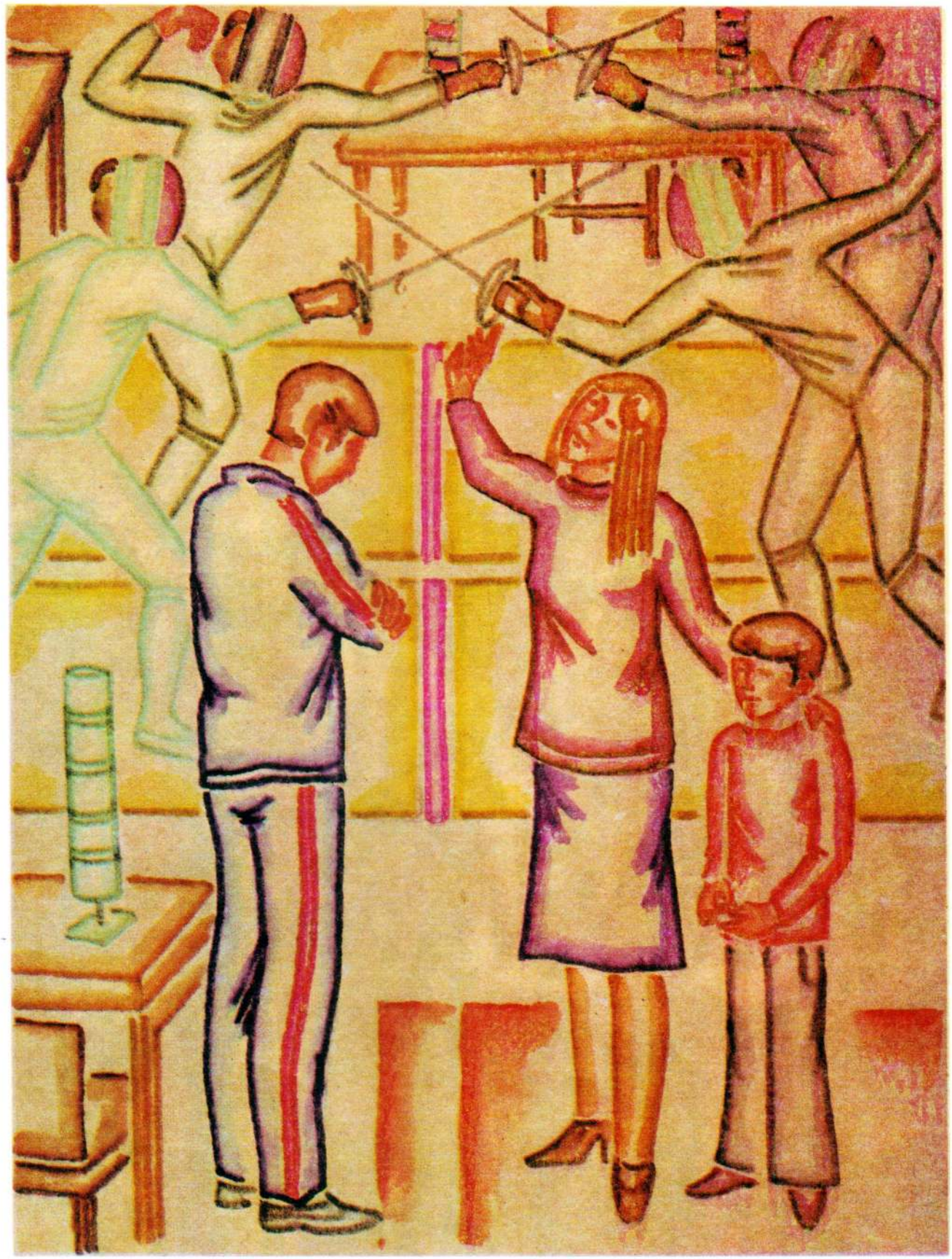
His mother did not notice he was nervous.

The trolleybus came smoothly up to the stop. Of all the different ways of travelling, a trolleybus ride is the most enjoyable. There're no gas fumes like on the bus, you're not shaken about like on a tram and unlike the underground, you're on street level and can look through the window as much as you like.

The sports centre was in a large modern building. There were colourful posters and huge violet-coloured adverts on the board by the entrance.

Roman's mother resolutely dragged him along. She opened a door and they entered the light spacious gym. Roman, who was trotting obediently behind his mother, stopped as if rooted to the ground. The gym was divided into several parallel yellowish strips. There were tables between the tracks which had green, red and white lamps on them. They flashed on and off as if they were magic. Roman saw the fencers on the strips. They were dressed in white breeches and white waistcoats and their faces were protected by grey metal masks which from a distance looked rather like honey combs. The fencers were furiously waving their arms. The swords in their hands clashed loudly and swished as they cut the air. All together they made an unusual and strange sound which at first frightened Roman.

A long cable was attached to the back of each fencer's belt. Sometimes the metallic



clinking was interrupted by loud unintelligible commands:

"Tuck your elbow in!"

"Keep the third! Strike in time!"

"What about parrying?"

The sportsmen stopped for a moment, nodded their heads obediently and then continued lunging at each other with the sparkling swords.

They all were so absorbed that no one seemed to notice that some newcomers had appeared in the gym—Roman and his mother. But, in fact, this was not the case because a slim young man came straight over to them.

"Good morning," he said and introduced himself: "I'm in charge of the fencing with foils."

"Good morning," Roman's mother replied. "It's time for my son Roman to take up some kind of sport and we've come to you to see if we'd like to go in for fencing."

"You're welcome," the coach smiled. "Fencing is an ancient and fascinating sport. It's totally safe! The sportsmen are well

protected by their suits and masks. Besides, you only have to gently touch your opponent's body and a light flashes on the electric panel to indicate a strike. The first one to get five strikes is the winner."

Satisfied by the theoretical side of the sport, Roman's mother immediately began asking practical questions: "Will my son be coached by you?"

"Yes, I'm getting a group together at this moment."

"What sports qualifications do you have?"

"I'm a medal-holder," replied the coach, slightly dismayed because he hadn't been expecting such a question.

"Have you got a certificate?" Roman's mother kept on.

"Of course, and here's my medal."

"And how many other medal-holders have you coached?"

"I only finished my studies at the training college recently and this is my second year of work." He was gradually recovering after her stunning attack but she didn't let up.

"How much time will you need to get my son up to that standard?"

"That depends firstly on him, his talent and hard work."

"And on your coaching ability, too," Roman's mother said proudly.

"To a certain extent, yes," the coach agreed.

"Now let me try and remember if there was anything else I wanted to ask. Yes, the most important thing. But what about the suit? How much does it cost and where can you get it from?"

"We provide the sports gear free of charge," the coach replied.

"Well, that's very good," she turned to Roman, "I like it here on the whole and the sport's so aristocratic and sophisticated. Have you already made up your mind?"

"Not yet," Roman retorted. His mother's questions seemed tactless, and he felt embarrassed and blushed.

The Boxing Gloves

"The Sokol Youth Sports Club of Housing Management Department No. 18" was written on a sign above the entrance of the house opposite.

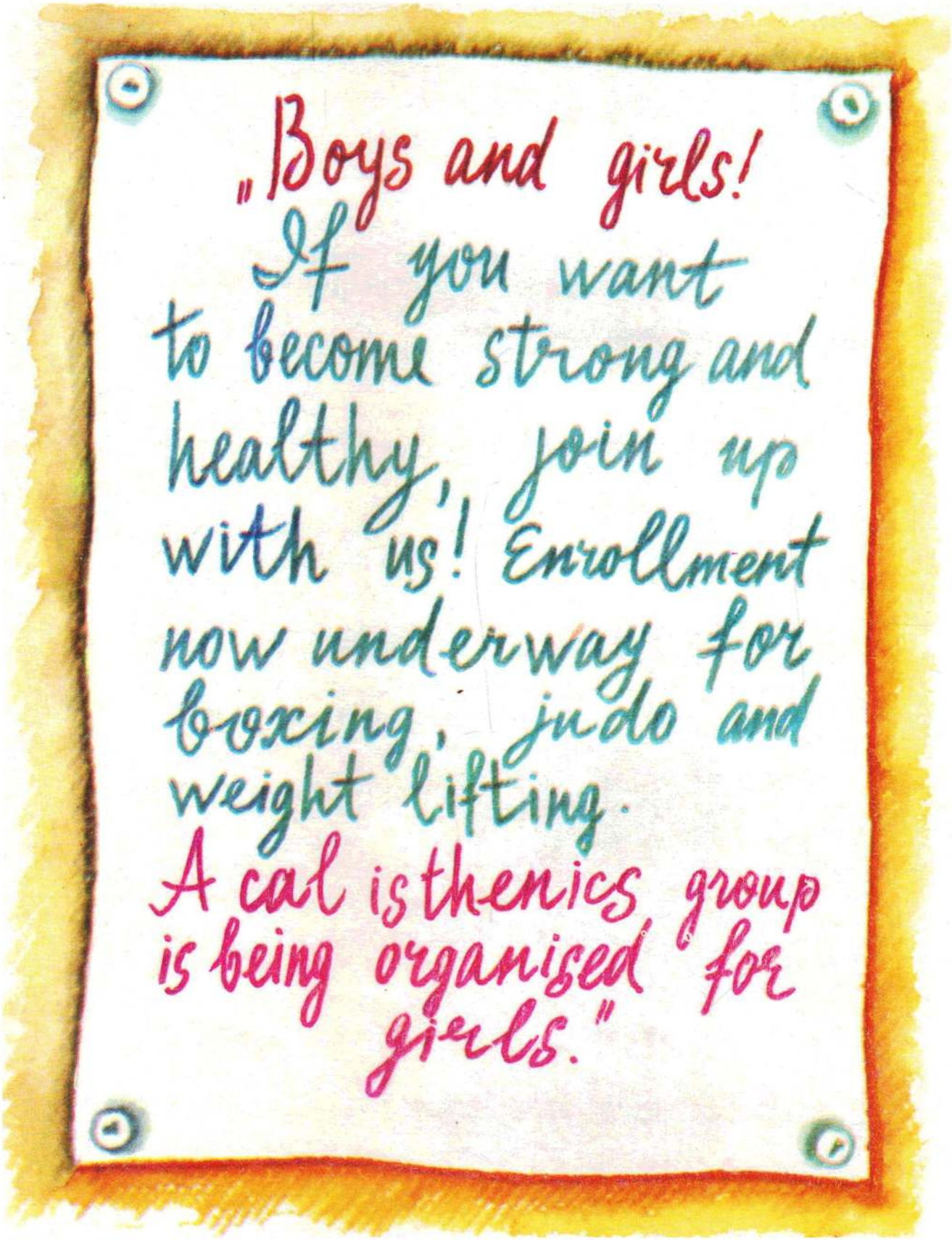
Roman had passed this house thousands of times: Kolya Rusov lived on the second floor! He had often seen this sign but had never paid any attention to it. It was only now that he had come here with his grandmother that he was looking at the sign in a different light. This ordinary street sign, which he had hardly noticed before, now gained new significance: you could go in for sport here too!

Roman read the announcement on the high narrow door: "Boys and girls! If you

want to become strong and healthy, join up with us! Enrollment now underway for boxing, judo and weightlifting. A calisthenics group is being organised for girls."

"There you are," his grandmother said with satisfaction. "It's very close. It's within easy walking distance and you'll become healthy and strong. And now put a brisk foot forward!"

They went into a rectangular hall with many doors. It was not like the entrance to an ordinary flat. It was filled with all kinds of sounds which merged together, echoed and resounded off the walls and ceiling. The sounds of a piano and sharp rapping commands rang out from behind the door marked "Calisthenics". Something heavy and metallic crashed onto the floor so loudly that even the walls shuddered slightly and a powerful heaving sound came from behind the door marked "Weightlifting". Strange crunching, hollow punches and the sound of someone's soles scraping across the wooden floor came from the door marked "Boxing".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girls."

Roman was at first dumbfounded by all these strange different noises which grated on his ears and became confused and even winced. He felt frightened and curious at the same time.

His grandmother kept completely calm. She quickly found her whereabouts in the new surroundings and rushed towards the coaches' room.

"Good day! We live in the house opposite. How can my grandson come and train here with you?"

"First he has to bring a note from his school-doctor to show he's well! And then, of course, he's got to want to train!"

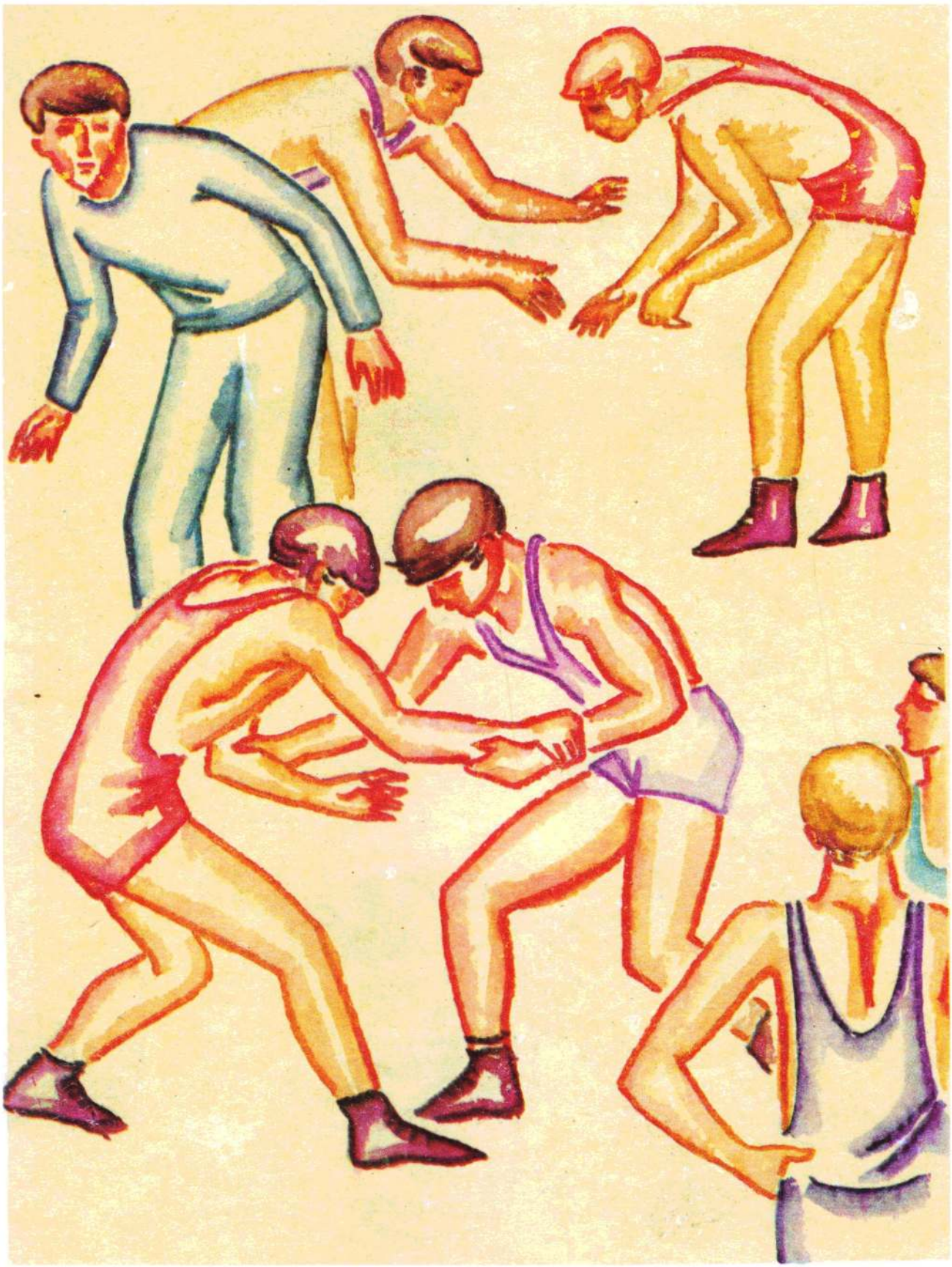
"We would like to sign up in the boxing section. Is that possible?"

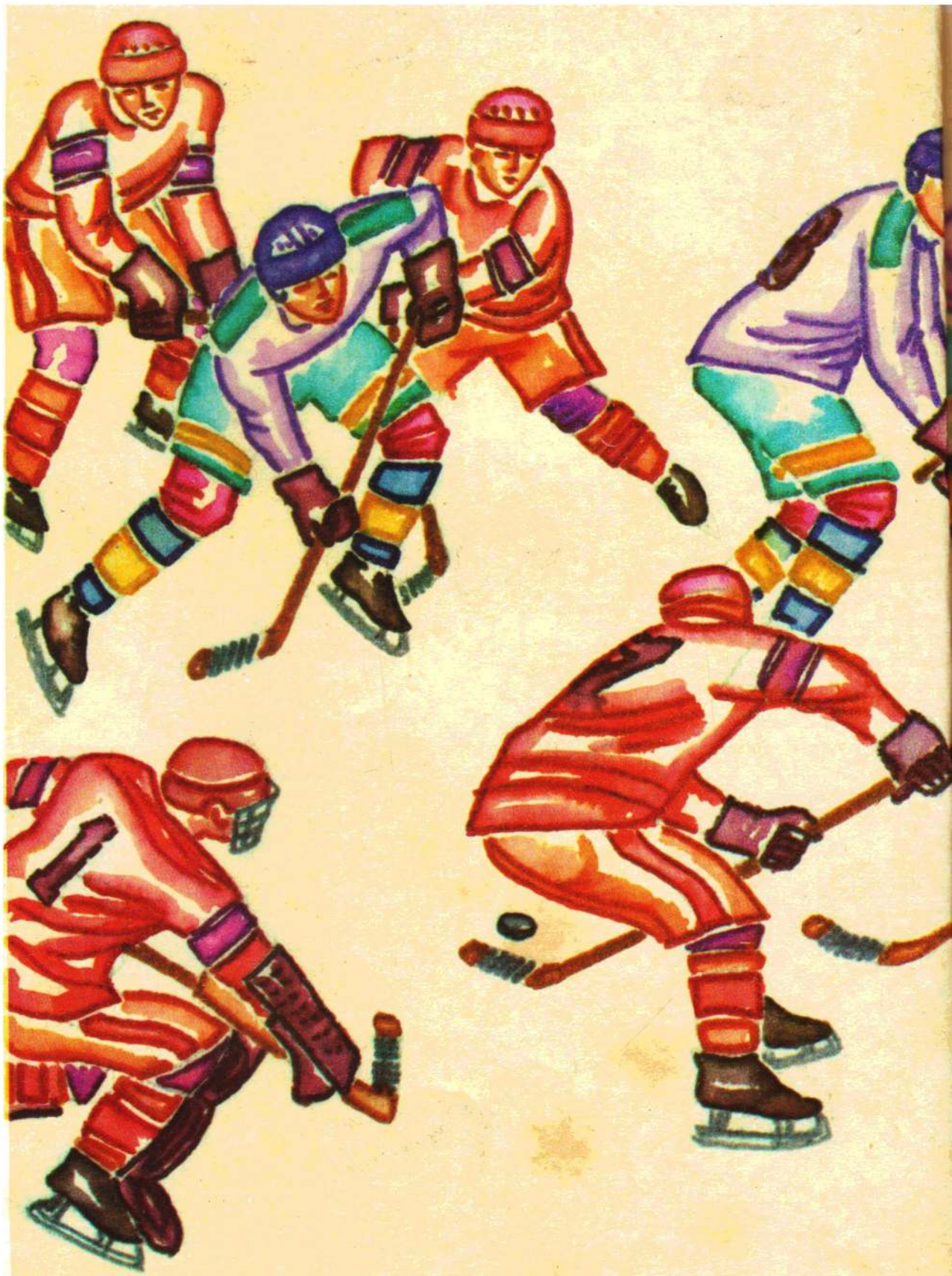
"Of course."

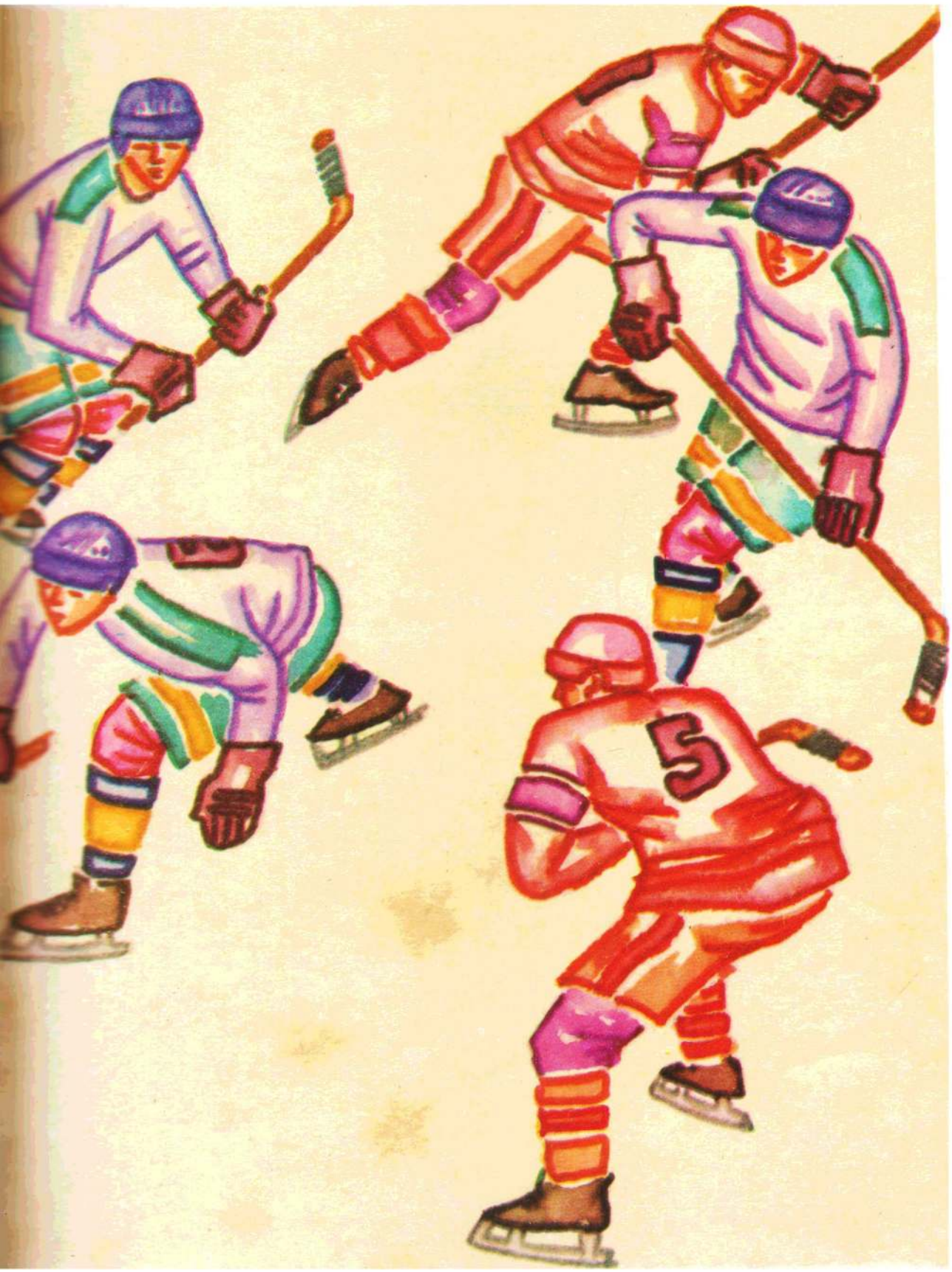
"And can we see round the gym, changing-room and showers..."

"By all means! Wait a minute and I'll call the boxing coach."

The boxing coach was an elderly man. His athletic bearing and the mirthful twinkle



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in his brown eyes made him look young for his age.

He took Roman's grandmother round all the rooms. She liked all the rooms, but, of course, the boxing room impressed her most.

"Roman for ages I've longed to see you here and waited for you at last to be old enough."

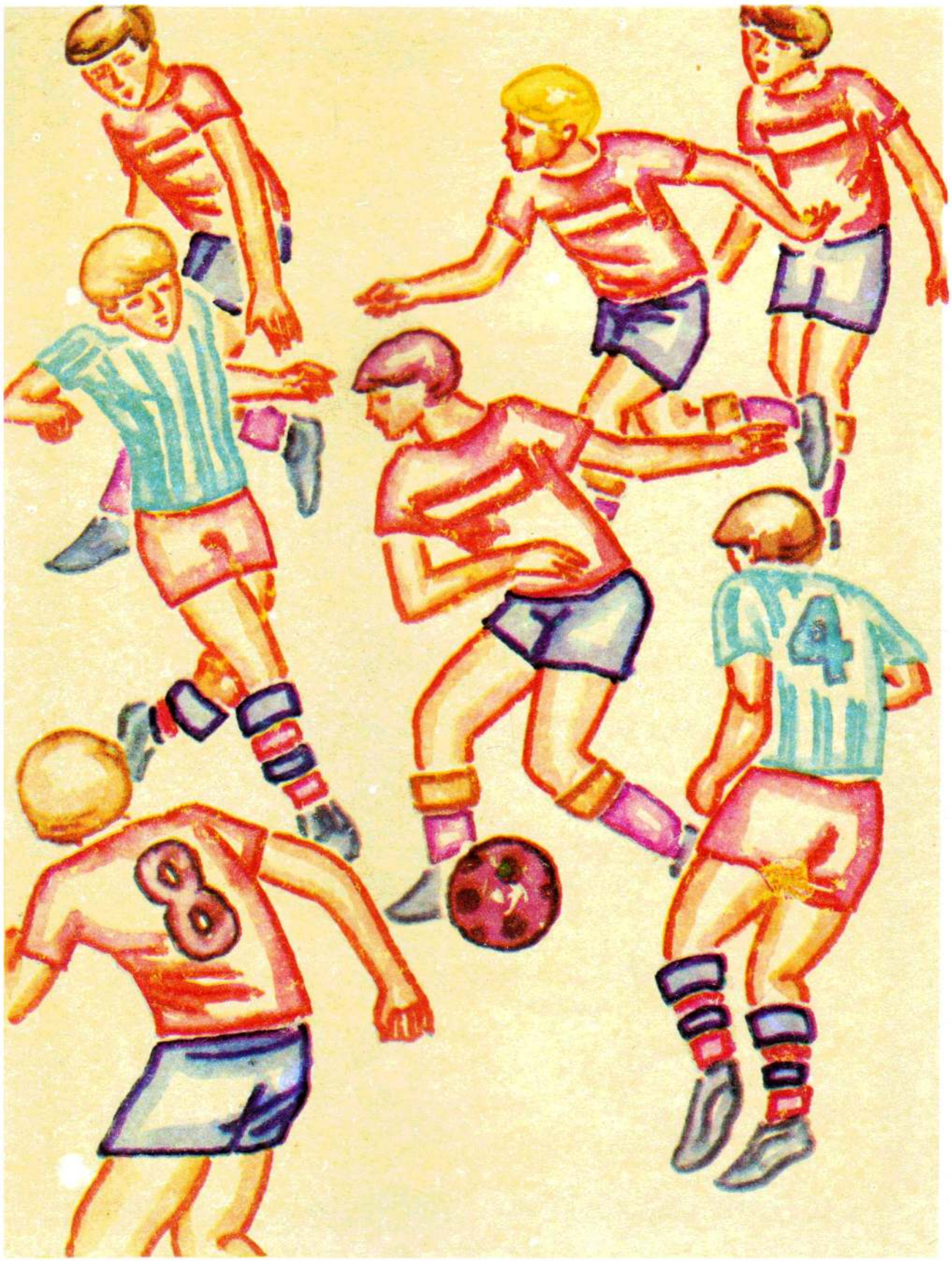
His grandmother's coaxing words did not have the desired effect on Roman simply because he was staring all round.

The boxing coach enjoyed acting as their guide.

"This is a recoil punching-ball," he pointed towards the frightening crunching sounds. "It's essential for developing accurate and fast punches. And there are punching-bags. Boxers practise different punches on it."

The sacks were hanging on long ropes from the ceiling. The boxers were pounding them with blows and the sacks were swaying lazily.

"This is a wall!" Roman had noticed a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large bulging square patch of wall covered with brown leather. Hollow thuds came from that part of the gym. "It's for developing a really hard, driving punch. In front of the mirror, you see, the boxers are fighting with 'shadows', their sham opponent's reflection. And here's the most important thing—the ring."

Roman looked at the mirror in front of which several boxers were comically jumping and waving their arms and was lost for words. He recognised Kolya Rusov among them.

"So that's why he gets good marks in P.T.," flashed through his head, "and I envied him."

Kolya also noticed Roman and waved his hand at him in a friendly way.

Suddenly Roman saw that Kolya's hand was completely covered with bandages.

"Kolya, what have you done to your hand?" he felt alarmed for his friend.

"Where?" Kolya exclaimed and began examining his hand.

"It's bandaged all over."

"Oh, you frightened me!" Kolya sighed with relief. "They're elastic bandages. All boxers bind their hands so that they don't harm their joints during the fight."

Roman looked round confusedly and noticed that a lot of the boxers' hands were covered with elastic bandages.

It was time to go home. His grandmother thanked the coach.

"Do come! I'll be pleased to see you," he said as he said good-bye to Roman.

The Choice

After school Roman pensively walked home. He did not know what to say to his parents or which sport to choose. He wasn't very interested in the options and he racked his brains to find a way of getting out of the fix.

He wanted to act in such a way that none of the family was dissatisfied with him but no matter how hard he thought, he could not think of a solution.

Suddenly someone slapped him on the shoulder.

"Feeling glum again?" It was Misha Sizov.

"You know," Roman admitted frankly,

"I've got myself into a sticky mess. Today I've got to decide which sport I want to take up and then tell my parents, but I still haven't worked that out!"

"You are funny! What's so difficult about that? Choose the one you like most!"

"But what if I don't know..."

"What do you mean?" Misha asked in surprise.

"Well, that's the point—I don't know!"

"You really mean," said Misha emphatically, "you just don't like any of them?"

"I suppose so," Roman muttered. For the first time he was looking at the problem in a new light. Before he had been thinking about not offending his parents but now he realised that he could deceive himself: "What should I do, then?"

"Why not choose another sport?"

"Which one?" he groaned in desperation.

"Listen," Misha said cheerfully, as if ignoring his friend's crestfallen expression. "Did you see the announcement downstairs in the changing room about enrolling for swimming lessons at the Young Pioneers'

Palace? I recently saw a swimming contest on T.V. and, you know, it really is a fine sport. I want to enroll. Let's go together. It'll be more fun then."

"Swimming?" Roman repeated and his eyes lit up but then clouded again. "But what about my parents?"

"Oh, you are funny! It's you who's going to take up sport, not them. So you choose one!"

Misha sounded convincing to Roman. "Whatever will be, will be!" he thought and asked joyfully, "When shall we go?"

"Tomorrow, after school."

The Swimming Section

On the way to the Young Pioneers' Palace Roman was again plagued by the same doubts and fears. He imagined that the swimming coach would be ever so strict and as soon as he found out that Roman could not swim and saw his weak body, he would immediately kick him out of the section, saying: "I don't want useless, puny creatures."

Roman told Misha about his misgivings but Misha reassured him: "Don't worry, I'll stick up for you. I already know how to swim. Just watch me and follow what I'm doing. O.K.?"

Roman nodded but he had butterflies in

his stomach and his head was filled with alarming thoughts all the way.

The Young Pioneers' Palace, a modern building made of glass and concrete, glittered enticingly like a diamond in the sunlight.

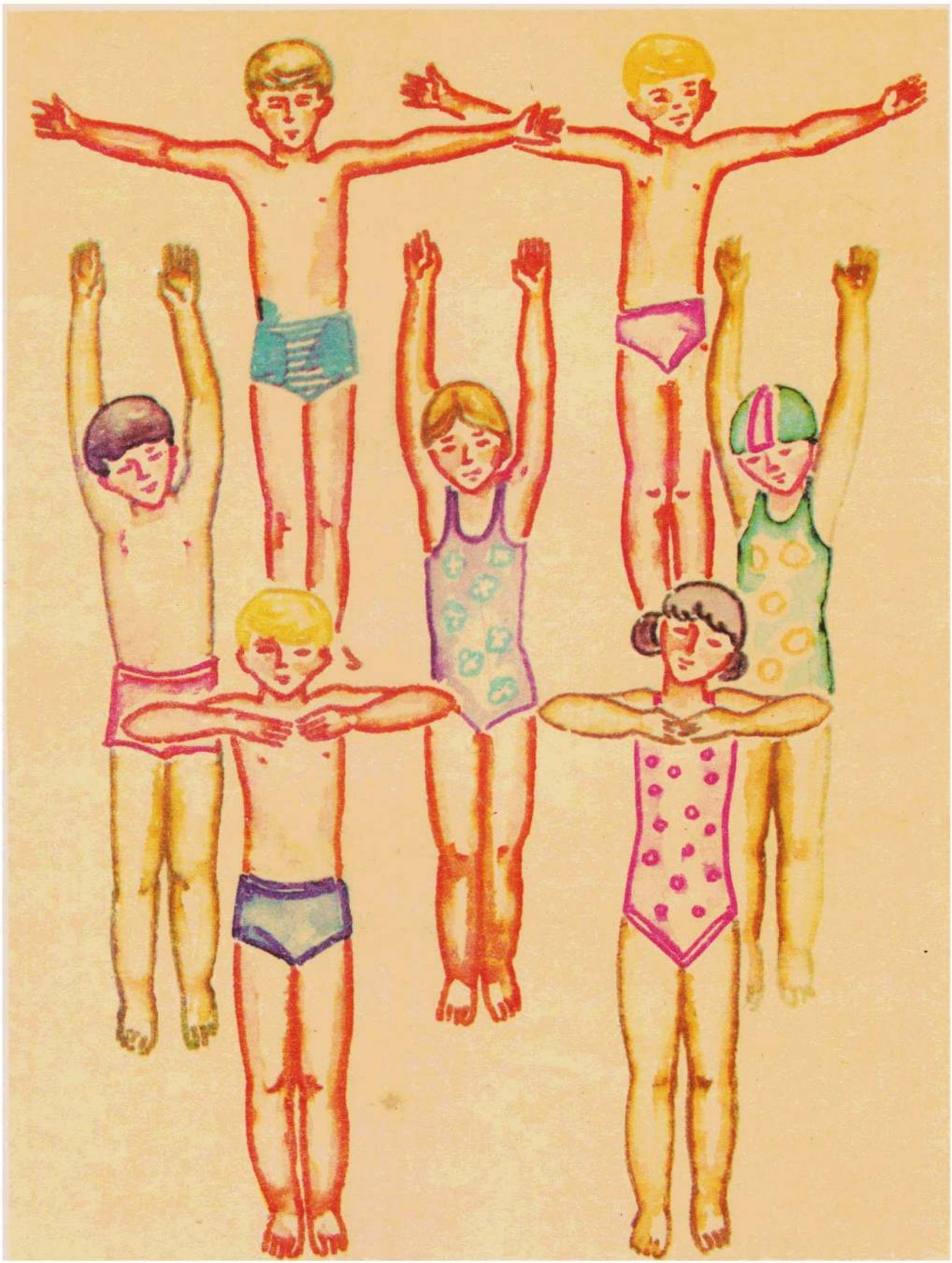
"Where are you off to?" the Young Pioneers on duty stopped Roman and Misha by the entrance.

"To enroll in the swimming section."

"Please, come in!"

Roman and Misha went through a large hall filled with exotic tropical trees whose tops intricately intertwined, forming a canopy of branches and leaves. On their way they kept coming across small pools of water in which different-coloured little fishes were swimming. Roman very much wanted to stop and look at them but Misha persistently urged him on: "Let's hurry up or we'll be late!"

They arrived at the pool just in time. All the children who wanted to take up competitive swimming had already gathered in the vestibule. A tall slim girl with sea-blue



eyes suddenly appeared. Her bobbed ash blond hair gave her face an energetic and mirthful expression.

"Let's get acquainted," she said cheerfully, "my name's Elena. I'm going to be your coach."

"What a lovely teacher!" Misha whispered in delight and nodded at the square silver badge on the front of the coach's track-suit and added with admiration: "She's a medal-holder."

"And not a teacher but a coach," Roman corrected him. He also liked his future coach and wasn't at all frightened of her.

"Now then, my young champions, who among you does exercises in the morning?" she asked.

Two or three hands shyly went up.

"Well, that won't do, friends. From now on everyone must do them every morning! Who can swim?"

Many more hands went up. Misha stretched his hand up higher than anyone else.

"Now that's better," the coach smiled.

Roman's misgivings returned again. He suddenly felt despondent. He did not want to look at lucky Misha, especially as Elena was looking attentively at him.

"Which stroke do you know?"

"The... the...," Misha mumbled and began looking round as if he was at the black-board during a lesson.

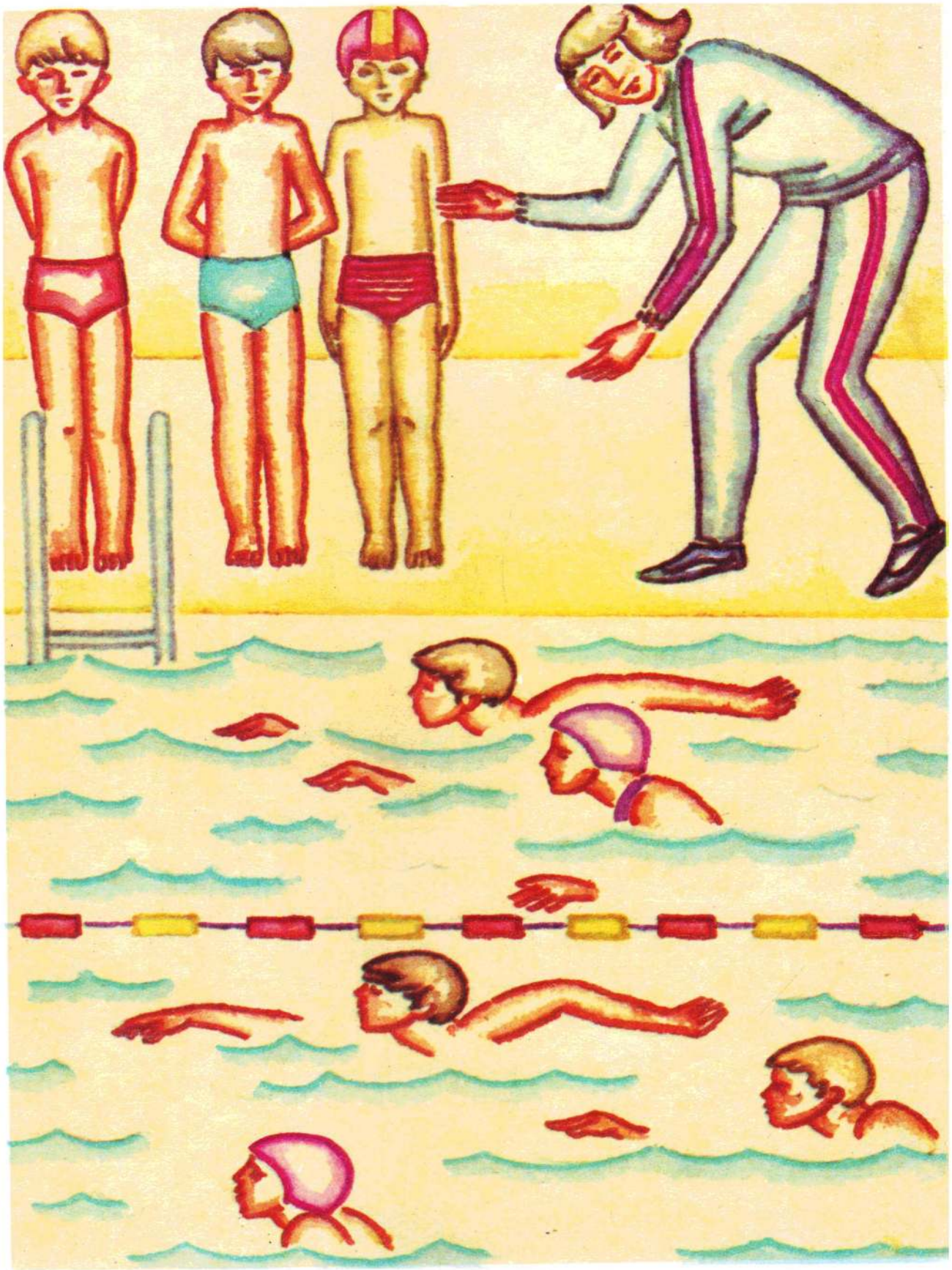
"The doggy-paddle!" someone shouted.

"The doggy-paddle," Misha repeated in the normal way and the loud laughter that followed made him blush to the roots of his hair. Misha turned round and shook his fist.

"There's no reason to feel hurt," said Elena. "You're the one who's to blame—don't repeat other people's words!" and then she added, "Now, every one get changed!"

Roman especially liked the water in the swimming-pool. It was breathtakingly blue and so clear that you could see every little stripe on the bottom.

Roman thought that the children were going to get into the water and have to do



some tests. But he was wrong. First they began to learn the crawl by the side of the pool. They imitated the movements of the arms and legs. Roman was already expecting to get into difficulties. The tiling floor around the pool was rather rough. So, stepping on the floor with your bare feet and doing the exercises was ticklish and rather frightening.

"Are we going to swim today?" Misha asked the coach.

"No."

"When are we, then?" someone behind Roman asked.

"When you've learnt to do all the strokes properly."

Roman did the various exercises set by the coach with the others, but he thought that he was doing them worse than everyone else. "I'm so useless. I'm probably doing them all so badly that she isn't even looking in my direction!" He envied the other children whom the coach went up to and made various suggestions.

"Perhaps I shouldn't come here any

more," Roman wondered. "Why be worse than everyone else?"

But strangely enough, these thoughts had the reverse effect: he wanted to learn so much that he tried his uttermost, even though he was already tired and breathing heavily. He did not notice the coach come up to him.

"Well done, Roman!" she praised him and said loudly. "Today I'm especially pleased with Roman's progress. He has done all the exercises very diligently and received the least number of corrections."

Roman's heart began pounding joyfully. Although his legs were tired and weak and his body felt leaden, he was inwardly happy and kept thinking: I can do it!

The Solution

The telephone kept on ringing. Roman's mother answered it, "Hello, yes... just a minute," she put the receiver on the table and called, "Roman, it's for you! Misha!"

Roman ran up to the phone, munching a sandwich as he went, "Hello, Misha... Alright, I'll be there in five minutes. Bye!"

Roman ran into the corridor, quickly put on his jacket, grabbed his sports-bag and rushed to the door, "I'm off!"

"Where to?" his grandmother asked anxiously. "Wait, you haven't finished eating!"

"I haven't time, I'm already late for swimming as it is!"

"I won't let you go," his grandmother

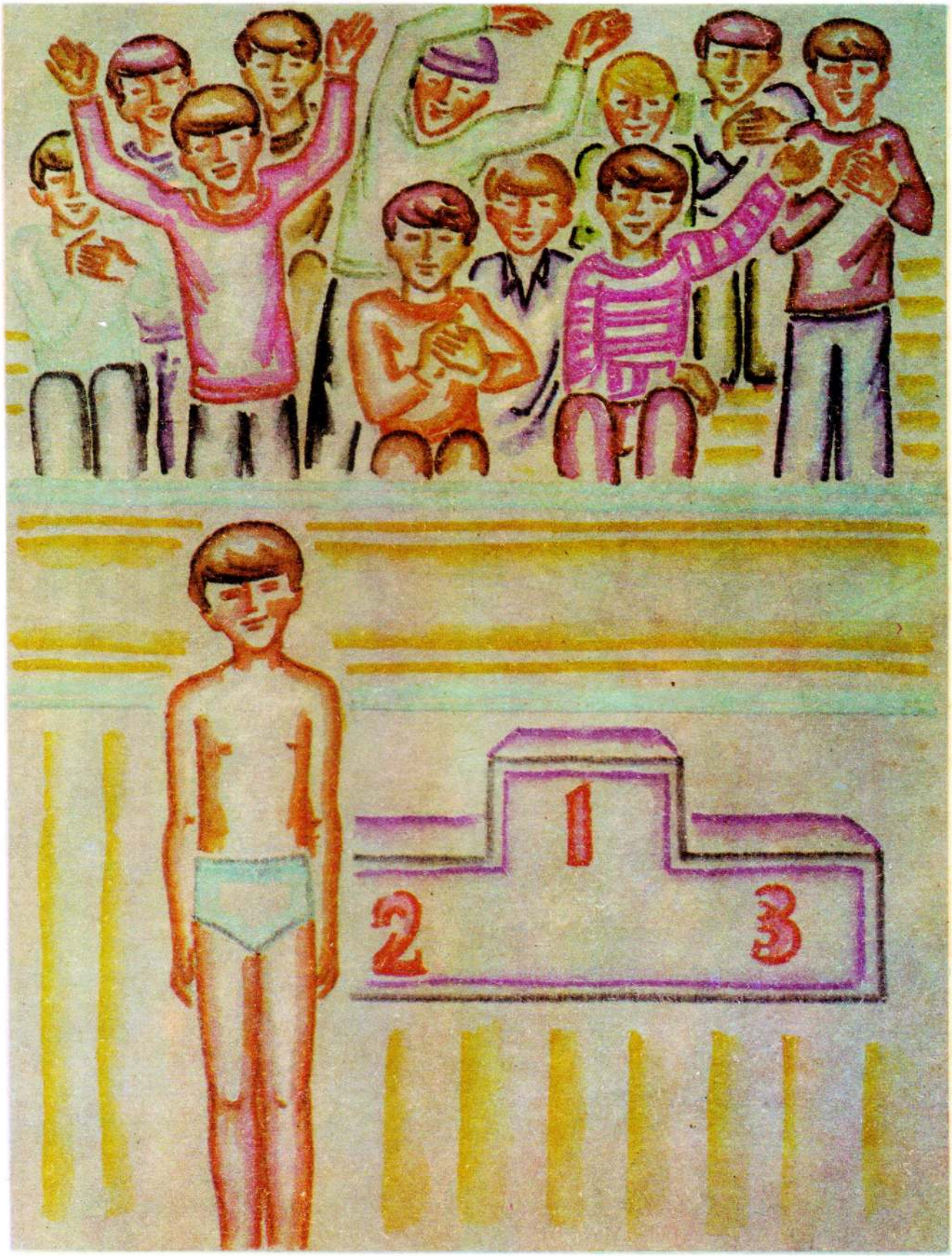
tried to block the door, "I won't let you go until you've finished! You'll drown, you're so hungry!"

Roman skilfully dodged his grandmother's arms, slipped past her through the door and onto the landing. Out of her clutches, he turned for a moment, "Granny, you know when a person eats a lot, he feels as if he's got a heavy rock in his stomach. And with a rock like that I probably will drown in the pool!" and pleased with his joke, Roman tore downstairs, skipping over the steps.

"Oh, you little rascal!" his grandmother waved her arms in surprise. "Just you wait!"

Closing the door, she went back into the room and began complaining, "The child's completely spoilt! He's changed so much! He's rude, disobedient and doesn't eat any more. When I told him to give up his swimming and take up a real sport, do you know what he said? 'Granny, if you like boxing, take it up yourself! But I enjoy swimming!'"

"Yes, I've noticed, too, something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strange is happening to our boy," his mother chimed in. "Roman used to be so obedient and quiet. He'd come home from school and sit quietly studying in his room. But now he's got completely out of hand! He doesn't obey anyone, does everything his own way and is always rushing off somewhere. And then there's all these phone calls! I don't like it at all," she looked at her husband. "I think we shouldn't let things go on this way! You as his father should have a serious, man-to-man talk with your son."

"Well I never!" Roman's father smiled. "You're really down on the boy! Just remember what you were like in your childhood! Weren't you just like him? I certainly was! And I'm very glad that our Roman has stopped being 'Mummy's little boy' and turned into a normal child or, rather, a real boy. And that's all thanks to sport!"